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*The Sequential Forms in Late Egyptian and Biblical Hebrew:  
A Parallel Development of Verbal Systems*

by

Antonio Loprieno



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**THE SEQUENTIAL FORMS IN LATE EGYPTIAN AND BIBLICAL HEBREW:  
A PARALLEL DEVELOPMENT OF VERBAL SYSTEMS\***

by

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This paper presents the analysis of a common feature in Late Egyptian and Biblical Hebrew verbal systems, namely the existence of "sequential" forms, used to coordinate two sentences sharing the same time reference. This feature is analyzed both synchronically and diachronically, whereby it appears that sequentiality is not a distinctive element of Egyptian and Semitic throughout their linguistic development, but a characteristic of that area of Afroasiatic in one definite period of time. The formation of a new verbal paradigm containing sequential forms is tentatively interpreted within the general perspective of the creation of conjugated forms which supersede, in Late Egyptian (plus Demotic and Coptic) and Biblical Hebrew (plus the post-Biblical language) the old formations, where differences in vocalic patterns indicated morphological varieties (Middle Egyptian *sdm.f* and Proto-Semitic/Ugaritic *yqtl*).

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Apart from etymological and morphological relationships, which are constantly being investigated in depth,<sup>1</sup> Egyptian and Semitic share numerous syntactic features and grammatical evolutions which are less dealt with in works on Afroasiatic linguistics. The present paper presents a few considerations on one of these syntactic parallelisms, namely the evolution towards a new verbal system in Egyptian as it was written in the colloquial texts of the New Kingdom (Davis 1973:1-8)—commonly called Late Egyptian—and in Biblical Hebrew, one of the most representative Central Semitic languages.<sup>2</sup>

I shall not be concerned with the problem whether the similarities which will be studied are due to influence of one language on the other, or on the contrary whether they are simply the effect of coincidence of syntactic patterns. As will be explained later, my interest is here essentially typological, and I see the common development of two Afroasiatic verbal systems as a parallel answer to similar evolutive pressures.

Among the most important new features shown by Late Egyptian verbal system when compared with that of the preceding stage of the language we find:

(a) the considerable development of prepositional constructions with the particle *iw* “SIT.”,<sup>3</sup> especially *iw.f hr sdm* ‘SIT.-him on hearing’, known in Middle Egyptian but not too commonly used;

(b) the emergence of the “conjunctive” *mtw.f sdm* with-him hearing>‘and he will hear’.

To these we must add the progressive restriction of the use of Middle Egyptian suffix conjugation forms which followed the model “root (+ conjugation marker) + subject”; indicative past *sdm <.n>.f* ‘he heard’, prospective *sdm.f* ‘he will hear’, optative and resultative *sdm.hr.f* and *sdm.k3.f* ‘may he hear’, ‘then he will hear’; a few morphological modifications in other forms: the nominal form *mrr.f* ‘that-he-loves’ becomes in Late Egyptian *iir.f mrt* that-he-makes loving> ‘that he loves’; finally, the appearance of new negative constructions.

If we consider things carefully, we can easily realize that (a) and (b) are caused by some of the other modifications: *iw.f hr sdm* and *mtw.f sdm* have assumed the functions of the old suffix conjugation forms, by filling the gap left by their loss; the former is used in narrative contexts (as we shall see), in the functions once held by the continuative *sdm.n.f* ‘(and) he heard’<sup>4</sup>; the latter is used in future and optative contexts, where Middle Egyptian preferred to use the prospective *sdm.f* or the forms *sdm.hr.f* and *sdm.k3.f* in more formal texts (Gardiner 1957:346-347). As for the nominal form, one asks oneself

<sup>1</sup>Cf. the bibliography cited in Hodge (1971:22-26) (by Hodge) and pp.61-66 (by Vergote).

<sup>2</sup>For this recent and insightful classification cf. Hetzron (1976:101-106), where the new distribution of Semitic languages is justified on the basis of the crucial connections existing between the traditionally called “North-West Semitic” languages, i.e. Ugaritic, Canaanite and Aramaic, and Arabic (previously classified as “South-West Semitic”). Modern Semitists are rightly more inclined to consider these connections than was done in the past decades (Hetzron 1969:21).

<sup>3</sup>This particle does not have a specific semantic value. In the light of what I explain in 2.1, I call it a “situative” morpheme (“SIT.”).

<sup>4</sup>As a point in favor of my theory, it is worth noting that Late Egyptian has adapted the Middle Egyptian narrative form *sdm.in.f* ‘heard-then-he’ to the new pattern, developing the use of *wn.in.f hr sdm* was-then-he on hearing> ‘then he heard’, very often used in the tales of the New Kingdom.

whether we are not in the presence of dialectal divergences between Middle and Late Egyptian, especially if one remembers that: (a) Old Egyptian shows forms with the *j*-prefix for many verbal roots (Edel 1955: 199-203), whereas in Middle Egyptian such a feature does not appear; (b) Coptic Second Tenses (derived from nominal forms of older periods) present even other morphological varieties, like the marker *nt* (<*ntj*) in the Second Perfect *nt-afsōtm* 'that-he-heard' (Polotsky 1960:398-400; Till 1970:172-173), which stresses the interesting relation between nominal forms and relative forms.

In this way, forms of adverbial origin, originating in a prepositional phrase PREP. + INFINITIVE, have superseded verbal forms: the conjunctive too, which appears in Late Egyptian as a verbal form, originates from a similar adverbial construction:

- |     |                               |  |
|-----|-------------------------------|--|
| (1) | <i>hn<sup>c</sup> sdm ntf</i> | with hearing by-him >                              |
|     | <i>hn<sup>c</sup> ntf sdm</i> | with by-him hearing >                              |
|     | <i>mtw.f sdm</i>              | with-him hearing > 'and he will hear' <sup>5</sup> |

If we isolate the two considered forms *iw.f hr sdm* and *mtw.f sdm*, we can observe that one of them is introduced by the particle *iw*, and the other, etymologically, by the preposition *hn<sup>c</sup>* 'with'. I claim that both these morphemes have "conjunctive" meaning. If for *hn<sup>c</sup>* that is not difficult to admit, this interpretation of the role of *iw* appears at first very debatable. The following paragraph will examine its function in Late Egyptian.

## 2. SEQUENTIALITY IN LATE EGYPTIAN

### 2.1. Past sequentiality

*Iw* has been claimed in more than one study (Young 1953:248-252; Sheehan 1971:39-43) to have an etymological relationship with the Semitic conjunction *w* 'and'. Leaving etymology aside, many elements confirm some functional similarities between the two morphemes:

- (a) they both introduce the subject of verbal forms or adverbial predicates;
- (b) they can both have circumstantial meaning (in Egyptian, from the Middle Kingdom on):

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| (2) | <i>iw.f mt</i> ( <i>Two Brothers</i> 13,3)              |
|     | SIT.-him being-dead                                     |
|     | 'while he was dead', 'he being dead'                    |
| (3) | <i>wāhū' yōšēb peṭaḥ-hā'ōhel</i> ( <i>Genesis</i> 18,1) |
|     | and-he sitting entrance-the tent                        |
|     | 'while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent'      |

<sup>5</sup>This evolution seems to me the most plausible, as all the intermediate forms are documented in texts from the XVIII Dyn. Cf. Gardiner (1928:86-96), further confirmed by Černý (1949:25-30). For different opinions cf. Mattha (1947: 43-55) and Volten (1964:54-80).

The original meaning of the morpheme *iw* is probably “situative”; it represents a means to indicate the situation of the subject, be it in the indicative<sup>6</sup> or in the circumstantial use (Callender 1975b:29; Polotsky 1976:34-6). Thanks to the mentioned correspondence with the Semitic conjunction *w*, we understand the Late Egyptian use of *iw*-constructions in narrative contexts, to link a sentence with the preceding one if they share the same time reference. This is the way the indicative *iw.f hr sdm* is used in Late Egyptian:

(4) LATE EGYPTIAN (*Two Brothers* 12, 10-13,3)

*Wn.in.f hr it3 p3j.f h<sup>c</sup>w hn<sup>c</sup> n3j.f tiwt m-mitt n3j.f*

was-then-he on taking the-his staff with the-his sandals likewise the-his

*hbsw hn<sup>c</sup> n3j.f h<sup>c</sup>w-nw-r<sup>c</sup>-ht, iw.f hr f3.tw.f r mš<sup>c</sup>*

clothes with the-his implements those-of combat, *SIT.-him on*

*carrying-him(self) to walking*

*r t3 Int p3<sup>c</sup>š, iw.f hr<sup>c</sup>q r p3 bhn n p3j.f sn šri,*

to the Valley the Pine, *SIT.-him on entering* the mansion that-of

the-his brother young

*iw.f hr gm p3j.f sn šri sdr hr p3j.f h<sup>c</sup>ti iw.f mt.*

*SIT.-him on finding* the-his brother young being-lying on the-his

bed *SIT.-him being-dead*

‘Then he took his staff and his sandals and also his clothes and his weapons of war, *and he began* to walk to the Valley of the Pine, *and he entered* his younger brother’s mansion, *and he found* his younger brother lying dead on his bed.’

(Here and in the following Egyptian and Semitic passages, emphasized sentences are those containing sequential forms.)

<sup>6</sup>As I am concerned in this paper only with this use of *iw.f hr sdm* ‘and he heard’, it is probably useful to point out that beneath this construction lay concealed two divergent forms: the “indicative” *iw.f hr sdm* with past sequential meaning (‘and he heard’), and the “circumstantial” *iw.f hr sdm*, i.e. the circumstantial form of the first present *sw hr sdm* he [is] on hearing> ‘he hears’, with the same tense indication as that of the predicate it is linked with (=relative present): *iw.f hr sdm* *SIT.-him [being] on hearing> ‘while he heard/hears/will hear’* (Černý-Groll 1975:290-295). That the two *iw.f hr sdm*’s belong to two different paradigms is shown by the analysis of their negative constructions: the “indicative” form is negated by *iw.f hr tm sdm* *SIT.-him on not-doing hearing> ‘and he didn’t hear’*:

(Černý-Groll 1975:431) ...*iw.i (hr) ph p3 hrw irm.w, iw.w (hr) tm irt bin hr.i, iw.w (hr) irt n.i nfr.*

*SIT.-me (on) reaching the day with-them, SIT.-them (on) not-doing making wrong on-me, SIT.-them (on) making to-me good*

‘...and I have reached today with them, and they haven’t done any wrong to me, but they have dealt well with me’

The “circumstantial” form, on the contrary, is negated by *iw bn sw hr sdm* *SIT. not he [being] on hearing> ‘while he didn’t/doesn’t/won’t hear’*:

(Černý-Groll 1975:304-305) *iw bn tw.n hr nn m nn nb.*

*SIT. not we on omitting in omission all*

‘while we aren’t making any omission at all’

Furthermore, as it will be observed, the indicative *iw.f hr sdm* doesn’t survive in later stages of Egyptian (with the exception of negative conditional Demotic *iw.f tm stm>Coptic eftmsōtm* ‘if he doesn’t hear’), whereas the circumstantial one is frequent in Demotic and Coptic, being negated by *enfsōtm an<\*iw bn tw.f (<sw) hr sdm iwn3* ‘while he does not hear’, with the circumstantial particle *iw* preceding the negative *bn*. Cf. Till (1970:167-173).

This use of a sequential past form is surely the one in which the language of the New Kingdom differs the most from Middle Egyptian, where the succession of events in the past is expressed by the *sdm.n.f* form 'he heard', i.e. the same form we find in initial position:

(5) MIDDLE EGYPTIAN (*Sinuhe* B 8-11)

*Nmi.n.i M3<sup>c</sup>tj m-h3w Nht, zm3.n.i m iw Snfrw, wrš.n.i m <sup>c</sup>d*  
traversed-I Maati in-proximity Sycamore, landed-I in island  
Snefru, spent-the-day-I in edge

*n(j) šht, ḥd.n.i wn hrw, ḥp.n.i z <sup>c</sup>h<sup>c</sup> m r-w3t, tr.n.f wi*  
that-of field, set-forth-at-dawn-I was(CIRC.)-day, met-I man  
standing in mouth-road, greeted-he me

*snḏ.n.f<sup>7</sup>*  
feared(CIRC.)-he

'I traversed the lake Maati in the proximity of the Sycamore, (and) I landed at the island of Snefru, (and) I spent the day at the edge of the fields, (and) I set forth at dawn, when it was day, (and) I met a man standing at the beginning of the road, (and) he greeted me, as he was afraid.'

We do not find here any distinct form corresponding to *iw.f hr sdm* in the Late Egyptian passage. *Iw.f hr sdm* 'and he heard' has superseded the suffix conjugation form *sdm.n.f* of Middle Egyptian in this specific function, its original feature being that, unlike its predecessor, it has to follow different verbal formations, adverbial phrases or frontal extrapositions (Černý-Groll 1975:423-428), and can never be used in first position.

## 2.2. Future-optative sequentiality

If we turn now to the conjunctive, we notice that this form links a predicate with the preceding sentence, and can never occupy the first position. It refers to events expected to take place in the future, often with optative nuance:<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>As one can see, Middle Egyptian doesn't have any separate sequential form for the past, using a continuative *sdm.n.f*. The first indicative *sdm.n.f*, however, has to be introduced by a particle (like *iw*), the following forms being linked back to the original particle 'at the beginning of the period' (Polotsky 1965:17-19; 1976:21).

<sup>8</sup>Wente (1962:304-311) and Lichtheim (1964:1-8) have produced evidence for the use of the conjunctive as a past continuative. Recent analysis of this tense (Kroeber 1970:140) points out, however, that there appears to be a definite evolution towards restricting the use of the conjunctive to the function I am concerned with in this study. It is interesting, in any case, that for the past continuative function a modern Indoeuropean language like English also uses an auxiliary which has originally OPTATIVE connotation: "(and) he *would* do so and so, and he *would* say to such a person", and so forth.

(6) LATE EGYPTIAN (*Two Brothers* 12,3-4)

*Wn.in.Tw hr mdt m-di.s r dit dd.s p3 šhr n p3j.s h3j,*  
 was-then-One on speaking with-her to giving will-say-she the  
 matter that-of the-her husband

*iw.s hr dd n Hm.f Cnh wd3 snb: Imi š C d <.tw> p3 Cš,*  
*SIT.-her on saying to Majesty-his being-living being-prosperous*  
*being-healthy: 'give will-saw-one the pine*

*mtw.tw sksk.f.'*  
*with-one cutting-it*

'Then Pharaoh spoke with her to cause her to tell the matter  
 of her husband, *and she said* (= past sequential) to His Majesty,  
 may He live, be prosperous and healthy: "Have someone saw the  
 pine *and cut it down* (= future-optative sequential)!"'

(7) LATE EGYPTIAN (*LRL* 6,3-4)

*M ir šm [r irt b] t3 r.w mtw.i gm.f n.k m bt3 C3.*  
 Do not make going to making mischief to-them *with-me finding-it*  
 to-you as abomination great

'Do not go to do them any mischief, *that I consider it* a great  
 crime on your part!'

To express this meaning, the language of the Middle Kingdom used the prospective *sdm.f* 'he will hear' (or suffix conjugation forms like *sdm.hr.f* or *sdm.k3.f* 'so that he hears' in less secular texts):

## (8) MIDDLE EGYPTIAN (Gardiner 1957:258)

*Mj, ntrw, ir.tn mkt.f.*  
 come, gods, will-make-you protection-his.  
 'Come, gods, and make his protection.'

(9) MIDDLE EGYPTIAN (*Sinuhe* B 199)

*Mhi hr h3t iwt.k.*  
 think on corpse will-come-you  
 'Think of your corpse, and come back.'

In parallelism with what we noticed in the preceding paragraph, we see that Middle Egyptian has no form limited to the function of the Late Egyptian conjunctive; to indicate a succession of events in the future, of expectations or of wishes, the language of the Middle Kingdom uses an "initial" form, whereas the conjunctive has to be preceded in Late Egyptian by the imperative, the prospective *sdm.f* will-hear-he> 'he will hear' (in oaths), *imi sdm.f* give will-hear-he> 'let him hear', *ih sdm.f* so will-hear-he> 'so he will hear', *iw.f r sdm* SIT.-him to hearing> 'he will hear', and cannot be found in initial position (Černý-Groll 1975:440-443).



### 2.3. The new system in Late Egyptian

Thus, using the morphemes *iw* 'SIT.' and *hn<sup>c</sup>* 'with', Late Egyptian adds to the verbal system of the language two forms specialized in a new function, i.e. that of providing a link with a preceding predicate sharing the same tense. The forms of this category, which becomes in my opinion the basic innovative feature of Late Egyptian verb, can be conveniently described as "sequential" forms:

Table A. Late Egyptian

	INITIAL	SEQUENTIAL
PAST	any verbal or adverbial formation referring to the past tense	<i>iw.f hr sdm</i> 'and he heard'
FUTURE- OPTATIVE	– imperative – <i>sdm.f</i> 'he will hear' (in oaths) – <i>imi sdm.f</i> 'let him hear' – <i>ih sdm.f</i> 'so he will hear' – <i>iw.f r sdm</i> 'he will hear'	<i>mtw.f sdm</i> 'and he will hear'

## 3. SEQUENTIALITY IN CENTRAL SEMITIC

The evolution of Central Semitic verbal system shows striking parallelisms with the Egyptian situation just described.

### 3.1. Past sequentiality in Biblical Hebrew

Biblical Hebrew is a Central Semitic language for which we dispose of relatively large documentation. Its verbal system shows two basic patterns for the indicative:

- a prefix conjugation, where the morpheme indicating the person *precedes* the verbal stem (*tāqūm* 'you will rise'), which has present-future time reference, with few exceptions;<sup>9</sup>
- a suffix conjugation, where the morpheme indicating the person *follows* the verbal stem (*qamtā* 'you rose'), which has past or perfect time reference.

<sup>9</sup>The main exception is the presence of the adverbs (*bə*)*terem* 'before' or *ʾāz* 'then', after which the prefix conjugation form has past reference: *bəterem tāqūm* 'before you rose' and *ʾāz tāqūm* 'then you rose' (Joüon 1965:304).

However, this verbal system shows a new feature not shared by the older languages of the same geographic area, namely the presence of a form of the prefix conjugation, introduced by the conjunction *w* 'and', used to indicate an event happened in the PAST, and of a form of the suffix conjugation, introduced by the same morpheme, used to indicate an event forecast, expected or desired in the FUTURE. These two forms are interpreted by traditional grammarians as being preceded by the so-called "conversive" or "consecutive" *waw* (Joüon 1965:319-337).

A closer analysis suggests that these two forms are used when there is a link with a preceding predicate not introduced by the morpheme *w*. Let us analyze the prefix conjugation form first:

(10) BIBLICAL HEBREW (*Genesis* 4,1)

*Wəhā'ādām yāda<sup>c</sup> 'et-ḥawwā(h) 'ištō, wattāhar wattēleḏ 'et-qayin*  
and the-man knew ACC.-Eve woman-his, and-she-conceived and-  
she-gave-birth ACC.-Cain

*wattō(')mer: 'Qānītī 'iš 'et-Yhwh.*  
and-she-said: have-bought-I man ACC.-Yhwh

'And Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and she gave  
birth to Cain and she said: "I have acquired a man from Yhwh."'

In an older attested Central Semitic language, Ugaritic, the situation is fairly different: there are apparently two distinct forms of the prefix conjugation used in reference to the past; in the *tertia infirmæ* verbs, the first shows the last radical:

(11) UGARITIC (*Aqht* 224)<sup>10</sup>

*Tnm.tšqy msk.hwt.*  
twice she-drunk (<√šqy) mixture that  
'Twice she drank that mixture.'

whereas the second does not:

(12) UGARITIC (*Aqht* 156)

*Ymḡ.lMr̄rt.tḡll.bnr.*  
'He-arrived (<√mḡy) to Mr̄rt.tḡll.bnr.'

Both forms may or may not be preceded by the conjunction, and are used both in initial and in sequential position. Mainly, but not only, in later prose, Ugaritic also uses the suffix conjugation form, which appears in both positions, to express the reference to the past:

<sup>10</sup>The numeration of the texts is given according to that of Gordon (1965:159-346).

(a) sequence *qtl-yqtl* (Held 1962:286-288)

(13) UGARITIC (*Baal and Anat* VII:21-22)

*Ṣḥq Ktr.whss // yṣu gh wyṣḥ.*

laughed *Ktr.whss*, raised-he voice-his and-he-shouted.

(b) sequence *yqtl-qtl* (Held 1962:288-290)

(14) UGARITIC (*Baal and Anat* IV:8-10)

*Yšm<sup>c</sup>.Qd <š>.wamr[r] // mdl.<sup>c</sup>r.šmd.phl // št gpm.*

heard *Qdš.wamrr*, saddled-he ass, hitched-he donkey, placed-he trappings<sup>11</sup>

As Gordon suggests, however, (Gordon 1965:68), the *qtl* forms may very well be infinitives used absolutely (a construction, by the way, very common in Middle Egyptian). The problem is consequently complex, but it can be said for sure that nothing exists in Ugaritic verbal system compared to sequential past in Biblical Hebrew, a language which appears to be innovative within Central Semitic in establishing this new function of verbal forms.

Sequential forms have to be linked to a different “non-sequential” predicate which precedes them.<sup>12</sup> The sequential form *wayyāqom* ‘and he rose’ is used only in that function, immediately preceded by the conjunction *wa-*: *wayyāqom*, never *\*yāqom* ‘he rose’. That this form is morphologically different from regular prefix conjugation form with present-future meaning is shown by many facts (Driver 1936: 120; von Soden 1959:263-265; Hetzron 1969:8-18):

(a) different stress in weak verbs: *yāqūm* ‘he will rise’ vs. *(way)yāqom* ‘(and) he rose’; *yāšūt* ‘he will put’ vs. *(way)yāšet* ‘(and) he put’; *yāšē(h)* ‘he will make’ vs. *(way)yāś* ‘(and) he made’; *tēlēq* ‘she will give birth’ vs. *(wat)tēleq* ‘(and) she gave birth’, with consequent shortening or disappearance of the unstressed vowel;

(b) different consonantal aspect, sufficient by itself to show that (a) is not a Masoretic innovation: *yqwm* vs. *(w)yqm*, *yšyt* vs. *(w)yšt*, *y<sup>c</sup>śh* vs. *(w)y<sup>c</sup>ś*. The difference between the two forms is identical to the one found in Ugaritic, where we observed *tšqy* (comparable to *y<sup>c</sup>śh*) vs. *ymğ* (comparable to *y<sup>c</sup>ś*);

(c) different vocalization of the conjunctive particle: *wə* (*ū* before labial sounds and *šəwā* ‘/’) vs. *wa-* (plus reduplication of the following consonant), with the full vowel kept.

<sup>11</sup> Fenton (1969:37-38) proposes that the *qtl* form could contain an emphatic element absent in the *yqtl* forms, which are often accompanied by adverbial adjuncts. A note may be needed here: in the Egyptological literature, when one speaks of emphatic forms, one refers to NOMINAL forms of the verb, the use of which stresses the presence of an adverbial adjunct; on the contrary, in Semitic literature a verbal form is called emphatic if its predicative function is more stressed than that of a regular form.

<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that *wayyāqom* is never found at the beginning of a verse, or even of a book. When this form is placed at the beginning of a narrative passage, it is linked by means of coordination with what precedes. As will be pointed out below, when I speak of “initial” vs. “sequential” forms, I never imply the existence of syntactic dependence; Egyptian and Semitic show a distinct preference for parataxis. “Sequentiality” is a device which creates COORDINATE sentences within a definite time reference.

This last point deserves attention. It shows, in my opinion, that this form is a remnant from an older linguistic stage, a stage in which the short unstressed vowel *a* had not yet undergone the phonetic evolution to *ə*, as it is common in Hebrew in pretonic position if not directly preceding the stressed syllable. In order to understand the strange reduplication of the pronominal prefix, I suggest that this was the only device the Masoretic system could use to keep the full /a/ phoneme, present in that form as inherited from older times. The Tiberian vocalization system does not allow a short vowel in an open unstressed syllable; by the reduplication of the following consonant the syllable became closed, and the /a/ phoneme could be properly kept. If the following consonant did not bear reduplication, this phoneme could not be kept in the system, and /ā/, having the closest phonetic realization, was used in order to replace it.<sup>13</sup>

The reason for trying to keep the [a] sound in past sequential forms was that *wayyāqom* was an old morphological formation, specialized in Hebrew in a new function unknown before. As I suggested above, Ugaritic shows in its verbal system a form of the prefix conjugation used to express past events: *ybk* [yabkī < yabkiy] (perfect) vs. *ybkū* [yabkiyu] (narrative present).<sup>14</sup> The first is precisely the form kept in Hebrew and specialized in sequential use with the conjunction *wə-*, pronounced like in the older stage; the second will eventually become the regular prefix conjugation of Hebrew, keeping the present-future reference but losing the narrative one (with the mentioned exceptions).

Sequential past is used essentially in narrative contexts, and not in poetry (Cazelles 1953:54), where the need for such a specialized form is much less urgent: each poetic sentence is, so to say, a complete unit within the composition, and is not linked within a specific succession of facts. It therefore becomes very easy to assimilate the characteristics of Biblical Hebrew *wayyāqom* 'and he rose' to those of Late Egyptian *iw.f ḥr sdm* 'and he heard':

- (a) their function is absolutely parallel, and their development appears to be similar;
- (b) they are both introduced by a morpheme linking them with what precedes;
- (c) they are both survivals of older stages of the respective linguistic developments, used in a new specific function.

### 3.2. Future-optative sequentiality

Turning now to the suffix conjugation form preceded by the morpheme *w*, i.e. *wəqūṭaltā* 'and you will kill', we can easily notice that it is always preceded by a regular prefix conjugation form (indicative or jussive) or by the imperative. It refers to the future, normally with optative or consecutive meaning.<sup>15</sup> 'so that you kill', 'and may you kill', 'and you will kill', and so forth;

<sup>13</sup> Hetzron (1969:9-10) suggests that the morpheme *wə-* is the remnant of a verbal formation *\*(ha)way* 'he was', so that *wayyāqom* would derive from *\*haway yāqom* 'he was he rose' > 'he rose'. Although I disagree on the problem of the origin of this form, however, I follow Hetzron's view that *wayyāqom* is clearly an old Semitic formation surviving in Hebrew. From a general linguistic viewpoint, I would defend my theory stressing the fact that it obeys the principle of linguistic economy, limiting the number of morphemes involved in this evolution (only two instead of three).

<sup>14</sup> On the absence of a *\*yaqtal* form in Ugaritic corresponding to Akkadian *iparras*, a topic of numerous studies, cf. Lenton (1970:41).

<sup>15</sup> Joüon (1965:327-328) suggests that when such a nuance is absent, Biblical Hebrew prefers the (non-sequential) form *wə* + subject + *yiqṭōl*. In any case, this form must go back to a period after the two originally distinct forms *\*yaqtulu* (indicative future) and *\*yaqtūl* (jussive) had merged, the two functions being present in *wəqūṭaltā*.

(15) BIBLICAL HEBREW (*Genesis* 24,4)

*Kī 'el-'aršī wə'el mōlaqtī tēlēk, wəlāqahtā 'iššā(h) liḥnī ləyiṣṣāq.*

but to-land-my and to fatherland-my you-will-go, *and-will-take-you*  
woman to-son-my to-Isaac

'But you shall go to my land, to the place where I was born,  
*and you shall take* a wife for my son Isaac.'

Ugaritic shows only one case of possible sequential *wqtl* 'and he will kill', recorded in a conditional sentence (Gordon 1965:69). We shall see later that the occurrence of a perfective form in such a context can be interpreted within a general Semitic perspective, as well as the presence of a suffix conjugation form in optative function:

(16) UGARITIC (*Aqht* 160)

*Riš.gly.bd.ns<sup>c</sup>k.*

head is-bound in-the-hand-of mover-you

'May your head bind in the hand of the one who moves you!'

The future-optative sequential form differs in Biblical Hebrew morphologically from usual suffix conjugation in the stress of first and second singular forms, where it falls on the suffix pronoun: *lāqāḥtā* 'you took' vs. *(wə)lāqahtā* 'and you will take', *'āmārtī* 'I said' vs. *(wə)'āmartī* 'and I shall say' (Gordon 1938:319-325). The fact that we never find forms like *\*lāqahtā* or *\*'āmartī* suggests that here too we are possibly in the presence of a divergent morphological formation. However, the form *wəqāṭaltā* 'and you will kill' does not show the expected evolution which would have produced *\*ūqāṭaltā*, had it followed the normal passage from Proto-Semitic to Hebrew. This strengthens the feeling that the accentual shift is in this case a later development (Gordon 1938:325). It can be suggested that Masoretes associated the *mil<sup>c</sup>ēl* (i.e. penultimate) accent to "past" reference (*qāṭaltā*, *(way)yāqom*) and the *milra<sup>c</sup>* (i.e. final) accent to future-imperative reference (future indicative *yiqṭōl*, imperative *qṭōl*, jussive *yāqōm*). By force of analogy, they provided those forms which usually had past reference with final stress when they were used to indicate a future condition (past *qāṭaltā* vs. future-optative *(wə)qāṭaltā*). As for the other forms, the first person plural of the future sequential does not show the shift of the accent probably under the influence of the corresponding pronoun *'ānāḥnū*, whereas the second and third plural were already stressed on the final syllable in non-sequential function: hence, no stress modification was needed (*wə'āmāmū*, *ūqāṭaltēm*, *wəqāṭalū*). But why then was this form chosen for the indication of future-optative sequential function?

Semitic languages, even the relatively late documented Arabic, when they intend to express the idea of a wish, a desire, use also the suffix conjugation (along with the jussive), because the wish or desire is presented as already having happened in the expectation of the speaker:

- (17) [I would like you to kill him, and consequently I wish this  
had already happened]> '(and) you have killed him'  
= Biblical Hebrew *(wə)qāṭaltā* *ōṭō*

- (18) [May God pray for him and grant him peace, and I know that indeed He will]> ‘God has prayed for him and granted him peace’  
 = Arabic *ṣallā llāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallama* (eulogy for the Prophet)

That explains why a form which usually has past meaning becomes specialized in the sequential future: a polar opposition (*way*)*yiqṭōl* ‘and he killed’ vs. (*wə*)*qāṭaltā* ‘and you will kill’ is created anew, differentiating Biblical Hebrew from other Semitic languages.<sup>16</sup> Hebrew *wəqāṭaltā* appears therefore to have the same function as Late Egyptian conjunctive, possibly with a parallel etymological origin: “conjunctive morpheme + nominal form of the verb + pronoun”:

- (19)  $\dot{h}n^c \dot{s}dm \ ntk >$  =  $*wa-qat^{\circ}l-(at)tā >$   
 $mtw.k \ sdm$  =  $wəqāṭaltā$

### 3.3. The new system in Biblical Hebrew

Table B shows the situation of sequential forms in Biblical Hebrew: (all forms are from the verb *qūm* ‘to rise’)

Table B. Biblical Hebrew

	INITIAL	SEQUENTIAL
PAST	<i>qām</i> “he rose”	<i>wayyāqom</i> “and he rose”
FUTURE- OPTATIVE	– <i>qūm</i> “rise!” – <i>yāqūm</i> “he will rise” – <i>yāqōm</i> “may he rise”	<i>wəqamtā</i> “and you will rise”

The initial forms can be preceded in the sentence by a conjunction *w*, but never directly: either the subject or an adjunct separate the conjunction from the verbal form and prevent it from acquiring the “sequential” feature given by direct juxtaposition:

<sup>16</sup>The concept of “polarity”, more than that of “analogy”, can be appropriately applied to many other problems of Afro-asiatic linguistics. The typical example is the strange concord of Semitic numerals “three” to “nineteen” with the nouns they refer to: Hetzron (1967:178-196).

(20) BIBLICAL HEBREW (*Genesis* 3,1)

*Wəhannāḥāš hāyā(h) ʿārūm mikkōl ḥayyaṭ ḥaššāde(h) . . . wayyô(ʾ)mer*  
 and-the-snake was shrewd from-all beast the-field . . . and-he-said

*ʿel-hāʾiššā(h).*  
 to-the-woman

‘And the snake was (= non-sequential) shrewder than any beast  
 of the field . . . *and he said* (= sequential) to the woman.’

(21) BIBLICAL HEBREW (*Genesis* 3,17)

*Ūlʾəḏām ʾamar: ʾKī šāmāʿtā ləqōl ʾišteḳā wattô(ʾ)kal min-*  
 and-to-Adam said-he: because listened-you to-voice woman-your  
*and-you-ate* from-

*hāʿēṣ.*  
 the-tree

‘And to Adam He said (= non-sequential): “As you have listened  
 to the voice of your wife *and you have eaten* (= sequential)  
 from the tree.”’

## 4. THE EVIDENCE OF CONDITIONAL CLAUSES

The behavior of the two considered languages in conditional clauses is likely to strengthen the results of my analysis.

It appears that *mtw.f sdm* ‘and he will hear’ and *wəqāṭaltā* ‘and you will kill’ are both used in the apodosis, after a non-sequential verbal form or an adverbial adjunct:

(22) LATE EGYPTIAN (*Wenamūn* 2,5-6)

. . . *iw.f (hr) ḡḡ n.i: ʾMntw.w iir sw m-m3ʿt! Iw.k (r) dit n.i*  
 . . . *SIT.-him (on) saying* to-me: they the-ones doing it in-truth!  
*SIT.-you (to) giving* to-me

*n irj.s mtw.i irj.s.*  
 to doing-it *with-me doing-it*

‘. . . *and he said* to me (sequential past): “Indeed, *they* did it!  
 If you give me something to do it, *I will do it* (sequential  
 future-optative).”’

(23) BIBLICAL HEBREW (*Genesis* 3,5)

*Kī yōdēa<sup>c</sup> 'ēlōhīm kī bāyōm 'āqolkem mimmennū, wəniṣqəḥū*  
 because the-one-knowing God that in-day eating-your from-it,  
*and-will-be-opened*

*ē(y)nē(y)kem wihiṭēm kē( ' )lōhīm.<sup>17</sup>*  
 eyes-your *and-will-be-you* like-God

'For God knows that if you eat of it, *your eyes would be opened*  
 (sequential future-optative) *and you would become* similar to God  
 (sequential future-optative).'

Both forms are also used in the protasis, if linked sequentially with a preceding predicate:

(24) LATE EGYPTIAN (*Doomed Prince* 6,12-13)

*W3ḥ p3 R<sup>c</sup>-Ḥr-3ḥtj mtw.tw nḥm.f m-di.i, nn iw.i r wnm.*  
 will-endure the Re-Harakhte *with-one taking-him* from-me, not  
 SIT.-me to eating

'As Re-Harakhte endures, *if one takes him away* (future-optative  
 sequential) from me, I will not eat.'

(25) BIBLICAL HEBREW (*Genesis* 44,22)

*Lō( ' )-yūkal hanna<sup>c</sup>ar la<sup>c</sup>āzōḥ 'eṭ-āḥīw, wə<sup>c</sup>āzab 'eṭ-āḥīw wāmēṭ.*  
 not will-be-able the-child to-forsake ACC.-father-his, *and-will*  
*forsake-he* ACC.-father-his *and-will-die-he*

'The child cannot forsake his father; *if he forsakes* (future-  
 optative sequential) him, *he would die* (future-optative sequential).'

In this last example both the protasis and the apodosis have a predicate *wəqāṭaltā*, there being a sequential link with the initial *lō( ' )-yūkal*, regular prefix conjugation form.

Once more, as it can be seen from the literal translations, the hypothetical meaning and the protasis/apodosis function are a need of our understanding of the sentence, not the indication of a specific syntactic structure in the Egyptian or the Hebrew text. The sequential form, with its variety of nuances within the future-optative reference, is also likely to be used in semantic contexts that our *Sprachgefühl* perceives as conditional.

<sup>17</sup>This example shows that the conjunction *w* before these forms has no real "conjunctive" meaning, but only "sequential" function. *Wəniṣqəḥū* is no information added to the preceding sentence, but the required logical consequence of it. In Indo-European languages we do not normally have such a use of the conjunctive morpheme.



## 5. DIACHRONICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The sequential forms appear to be a peculiar feature of Late Egyptian and Biblical Hebrew, not shared by the later stages of the two languages. *Iw.f hr sdm* 'and he heard' is replaced in Demotic by the past *stm.f* 'he heard' and the perfect *w3h.f stm* 'he has/had heard' (Johnson 1976:192;210); *mtw.f sdm* 'and he will hear' survives until Coptic *nfsōtm*, but its use is partially modified due to the introduction of Greek conjunctions (Till 1970:162-165); *wayyāqom* 'and he rose' and *wəqāṭaltā* 'and you will kill' are not kept in later stages of the development of Hebrew (Segal 1958:72-73).

This suggests, in my opinion, that the creation of sequential forms is a common pattern of Egyptian and Central Semitic in a specific period of their historical evolution, in which they respond in a parallel way to a few syntactic changes in their verbal systems; afterwards each of these languages adopted original devices for the expression of the tense indication. This phenomenon is comparable to that which affects, in the Indoeuropean world, geographic areas with languages unrelated to each other but sharing common linguistic features. One may think to a few syntactic characteristics of the Balkan languages (Sandfield 1930:163-216). Rumanian, Bulgarian, and Greek belong to three different families within Indoeuropean, and yet they present original elements not shared by other languages of those families. One might of course attribute this to the influence of substratum; however, the absence of any evidence of such a pre-Indoeuropean background suggests prudence in dealing with this issue.

The sequential function is assigned both in Egyptian and in Semitic to forms specialized in that use: the "indicative" (i.e. not circumstantial) *iw.f hr sdm* is found in Late Egyptian in continuing narrative passages and *mtw.f sdm* in continuing wishes or orders; similarly, *\*yāqom* is never found in Hebrew without the full vowelized conjunction *wa-*, and the same holds true (with the noted difference in the conjunctive morpheme) for *\*qāṭaltā*. Moreover, these forms go back to predecessors documented in older stages with other functions: *iw.f hr sdm* exists in Middle Egyptian (although it is not too common), where it has present and past reference (Gardiner 1957:247-248), *mtw.f sdm* originates in a split infinitive attested in the texts of the XVIII Dyn.; *wayyāqom* appears from the phonological and morphological analysis to be a remnant from older periods of Central Semitic, and the form is indeed documented in Ugaritic, *wəqāṭaltā* shows semantic features shared by all Semitic languages.

Combining the tables A and B, we obtain the following paradigm of sequential forms in Late Egyptian and Biblical Hebrew:

Table C. Late Egyptian and Biblical Hebrew

	LATE EGYPTIAN	BIBLICAL HEBREW
PAST	<i>iw.f hr sdm</i>	<i>wayyāqom</i>
FUTURE- OPTATIVE	<i>mtw.f sdm</i>	<i>wəqāṭaltā</i>

As I suggested above, the sequential forms appear nearly at the same time in the development of Egyptian and Semitic: the colloquial texts of Late Egyptian are dated to the XIX Dyn., and even later (Gardiner 1973:VIII-XV; 1937:XII-XXI), from ca. 1250 B.C. on; some phonological elements in Hebrew sequential forms (like the unusual place of the accent and the keeping of the /a/ phoneme in the conjunction) allow to date the creation of past sequential form in Central Semitic back to a time before phonological evolutions which appear to have taken place in Hebrew, and this brings us to a fairly contemporary period.

It is difficult to state, in my perspective, whether Central Semitic developed this feature under the pressure of the Egyptian model or vice versa. My personal opinion is that we do not have here the evidence of the influence of one language on the other: more likely, we have the proof that two related languages within the Afroasiatic family offer a parallel development of their verbal systems, and that they generate similar patterns for an identical function. It could be interesting to notice that sequential forms are present in Cushitic and Bantu languages of Eastern Africa, as an evidence that this verbal category is very productive even outside the considered area of Afroasiatic.

This phenomenon has to be analyzed within the broad perspective of the evolution of verbal systems in these languages. In the older stages of Central Semitic and Egyptian we notice the presence of a smaller number of conjugated formations, each of which concealed many morphological varieties with different vocalic patterns: it is the case of the prefix conjugation form in Ugaritic (which covers perfect *yáqtul*, imperfect indicative *yaqtulu*, subjunctive *yaqtula* (?) and jussive *yaqtúl*) (Gordon 1965:71-72; Hetzron 1969:1-3), or of the *sḏm.f* in Middle Egyptian (which covers indicative *sḏmú.f*, prospective *sḏmá.f*, circumstantial *sḏāmi.f* plus the nominal forms (Polotsky 1964:267-285; Callender 1975a:100-108)). The introduction of the sequential forms is the first step towards the creation of a system consisting of many conjugated forms with very distinct temporal references: in post-Biblical Hebrew and in Coptic no verbal formation refers to more than one tense.<sup>18</sup>

Egyptian and Central Semitic verbal systems offer many other points of interest for Afroasiatic comparative syntax. I would like to discuss two of them very briefly.

(a) Late Egyptian shows the verb *hpr* 'to become' in the past sequential form, with the function of a temporal adverbial adjunct in our languages:

(26) LATE EGYPTIAN (*Wenamün* 1,47)

... *iw dw3 (hr) hpr, iw.f (hr) h3b, iw.f (hr) it3j.i r hrj.*  
*SIT. morning (on) becoming, SIT.-him (on) sending, SIT.-him*  
*(on) taking-me to above*

"And at morning (past sequential) he sent (past sequential)  
 and he took (past sequential) me up."

This sentence reminds one of the Biblical Hebrew construction with the past sequential form of the root *hwy* 'to be, to become', exactly parallel:

<sup>18</sup> Also the Coptic circumstantial *efšōtm* 'while he heard/hears/will hear' is used with only one reference: that of present relative (Till 1970:154-165). For the evolution in Hebrew cf. Segal (1958:54).

(27) BIBLICAL HEBREW (*I Samuel* 14, 1)

... *wayəḥī hayyōm wayyō(')mer Yōnātān ben-Šā'ul 'el-hanna'ar.*  
*and-it-became the-day and-he-said Jonathan son-Saul to-the-boy*  
 'And the day came (past sequential), and Jonathan son of Saul  
 said (past sequential) to the servant.'

The parallelism can be detected both in the semantic choice and in the syntactic behavior of the two forms.

(b) The correspondence in verbal predicates which have no other function but that of situating the event in the past (a function that our languages normally assign to adverbial adjuncts) is also present in the future reference, exactly with those sequential forms which have been established by my paradigm:

(28) LATE EGYPTIAN (*Wenamun* 2,58)

... *mtw ḥpr ir m-s3 kj h3w mtw w<sup>c</sup> ipwtj ij m p3 t3 n km(t).*  
*with happening as-for after other day with one messenger*  
*coming from the land that-of Egypt*  
 'And after a certain time (future-optative sequential) a  
 messenger will come (future-optative sequential) from the  
 land of Egypt.'

Late Egyptian uses here the absolute form *mtw.Ø ḥpr*, with no subject (Černý-Groll 1975:444). Cf. Biblical Hebrew:

(29) BIBLICAL HEBREW (*Sophoniah* 1,8)

... *wəḥāyā(h) bəyōm zəḇaḥ Yhwh ūpāqadī<sup>c</sup> al-ḥāśśārīm*  
*and-will-happen in-day sacrifice Yhwh and-will-punish-I*  
*on-the-princes*  
*wə<sup>c</sup> al-bənē(y) ḥammelek.*  
*and-on-sons the-king*  
 'And in the day of the Sacrifice of Yhwh (future-optative sequential)  
 I will punish (future-optative sequential) the princes and the king's  
 sons.'

*Wəḥāyā(h)* has no subject, like Egyptian *mtw.Ø ḥpr* just analyzed.<sup>19</sup> Particularly interesting is, in both languages, the use of two future-optative sequential forms (the first with no subject and the second regular) in these "prophetic" contexts.

The produced evidence confirms, I believe, the proposed theory and stresses the importance of syntactic comparison within Afroasiatic linguistics.

<sup>19</sup> After *wəḥāyā(h)* 'and it happened' Hebrew has either *wəqāṭaltā* or simple *yiqṭōl*, in which case the clause containing *wəḥāyā(h)* is considered as an adverbial adjunct, deprived of any verbal status: the initial form is then to be used.

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